



**Saudi Arabia's Princess
Reema bint Bandar Al Saud
On Why Gender Equality Must
Be A Global Priority**

**Harper's Bazaar – February 15, 2021
– By. HRH Princess Reema bint
Bandar Al Saud**

For the historic advent of Harper's Bazaar Saudi, Her Royal Highness pens a manifesto on a topic at the very heart of the magazine's mission – gender equity

What's the real barrier to gender equity – to greater inclusion and diversity? Maybe it's the fact that we still have to ask that very question in the first place?

Today we can proudly point to the first woman US Vice President, the first woman to manage the European Central Bank or serve as Chief Economist for the IMF, the first Saudi woman Ambassador. However, as I've said many times before, the longer we identify the "first" woman this and the "first woman" that – gender equity remains a direction, but not yet our destination. The power of change comes in the quantity of outstanding women in leadership roles; so much so, that we forget who came first.

All progress matters and every step forward is important. Equally as important is our commitment to strive to do better for those women that will follow in our footsteps, to widen the path and the doorway and let them leave their mark. Because gender equity is not a selfish goal or objective - but rather, a necessity, an essential means for our continued progress as strong and healthy families, communities and nations. It's the only way we can ensure that so-called social and economic global advancement is actually advancing.

As we have seen this past year as the world has been ravaged by COVID-19, the impact has been far from gender neutral. Women have disproportionately suffered the social and economic consequences of this pandemic. Here are a few harsh examples: More women than men have been pushed into poverty, exploding the gender poverty gap. More women have lost their jobs than men. More young women have been forced to leave school than men (an estimated 11 million more young women worldwide), and more women are

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burdened with the emotional toll of the crisis, as globally, more than 70% of health care providers and first responders are women.

The facts are clear – greater attention to gender equity would have benefited the global public health response to the pandemic – something entirely unsurprising to those men and women who have worked to level the playing field, reduce the barriers and shatter the glass ceiling to enable and encourage wider social equity and economic impartiality.

Covid, as disruptive as it has been has also given us a chance to look back at the world as we knew it. Personally, as I sit and reflect, I recognize that I've had the privilege to live through a time of profound and historic change for women in Saudi Arabia. The catalyst of this change is our youthful and determined leadership who had a dream for our nation. Born of that dream is not only a program to diversify and strengthen the nation's economy, but equally a program to empower women, to make gender equity, diversity and inclusion, a driving force in the nation's plans for the future.

Everyone's seen the stories about women driving in Saudi. While that's important, what's arguably as notable and more important is that women in Saudi Arabia now enjoy equal pay, something many women in western nations still don't. That's the story of the new and developing Saudi Arabia, a story of change and evolution one step at a time.

There's still work to be done, both in the Kingdom and across the region, but the recent progress for women, the engagement of women in the workforce, the social and cultural opportunities being created for women, is truly profound. As we lift ourselves out of the pandemic, let's think of a new normal where technology is used to reduce gender barriers, where more women are empowered through financial literacy and where female entrepreneurship is strengthened, ensuring women have equal access to commercial and business ecosystems.

If we are to permanently change deeply held institutional bias and behavior, in the Arab world and beyond – there must also be new thinking, a change in attitude. In Saudi, there is and we call it, we live it and we breath it: Vision 2030.

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